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ABSTRACT

Some of the assumptions underlying educational assessment policies in England and Wales are discussed in terms of contradictions in the aims of those policies. Two key initiatives--the national "bench-mark" testing and records of achievement--provide the focus for illustrating the potentially fundamental change of emphasis in the nature and role of educational assessment that is currently taking place. Via a brief socio-historical analysis of the emerging role of assessment in education, the significance of current contradictions in each educational assessment is examined. The evolution of evaluative language, the trend toward "humanization," and student-centered teaching and evaluation are outlined. The central emerging contradiction involves the simultaneous use of education as an instrument of social control and its potential to act as a force opposing such control by equipping learners with the power to reflect upon and challenge the prevailing power. Comparisons to assessment approaches in France and West Germany are provided; and the Great Education Reform Bill of 1987, which calls for testing of all children at 7 years of age, is critiqued. Far from educational assessment provoking a legitimation crisis, it may be reflecting the emergence of a new form of disciplinary power into which the post-enlightenment abstract language of account, which made psychometric testing and self-surveillance possible, is combined with the pre-modern disciplinary code of direct surveillance of the person as a whole rather than as the occupant of a series of contractuallly-defined roles. (TJH)

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEMPORARY CONTRADICTION IN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT POLICIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

by

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The role of assessment in education

It can be argued that in education, assessment fulfils four main functions (Broadfoot, 1979). First, it enables particular definitions of competence to be applied; second it largely delimits the content of the curriculum; third, through the concept of competition it provides for the differential outcomes and rewards of education which are in turn translated into the finely differentiated occupational hierarchy of a modern industrial society. Fourth it provides a vehicle for control - control of individual aspirations and frustration through the legitimation of apparently objective educational judgements and control of the message producing system itself through the broader control functions embodied in procedures for teacher institutional assessment and accountability. All four of these activities are central to the form and organization of education as typically practised today in most societies with any kind of well-developed mass education system although their particular mode of institutional expression will vary according to the idiosyncratic ideological and institutional traditions of a particular education system. Given this pervasive and powerful role of educational assessment a study of the causes and effects of policy changes in this domain may well help to provide a better understanding of some of the fundamental changes currently confronting post-industrial societies and the various ways such societies are seeking to respond to these more or less critical developments through their education systems.

Educational assessment has recently emerged internationally as a key policy issue. In the business of teaching and learning itself and in the system that provides the superstructure for that process, issues of pupil assessment and certification, teacher appraisal and public accountability have become prominent in an almost unprecedented way. Assessment is now increasingly explicitly, a defining element in the construction of comtemporary education discourse. In particular, a study of assessment policy and practice can

reveal a fundamental contradiction in that discourse between its use as an instrument of social regulation and control and its potential to do just the opposite by equipping learners with the power to reflect upon and challenge prevailing power relations.

As Governments have striven to respond to the need for novel strategies of social integration and status legitimation we may trace the emergence of two distinct currents in educational assessment policy. One born essentially of the dominant new right political ideology emphasises the need to strengthen competition between pupils and institutions; by encouraging populist pressure for defined achievement standards supported by bureaucratic measures for the imposition of quality control procedures. The other, an heir to the more liberal era of the sixties, but also prompted by the need to make the products of schooling more suited to industrial demands, emphasises a more holistic student-centred approach to assessment in which the focus on skills and qualities, challenges the more traditional assessment concern with knowledge and understanding within subjects. In the United Kingdom at least, the traditional emphasis on narrow, norm-referenced and negative assessment has been replaced to a significant extent by a new assessment paradigm in which the emphasis is on procedures that are individualised and constructive, comprehensive and relevant. In a range of significant policy initiatives such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiatives (TVEI) designed to improve the curriculum in these areas for 14-18s and the Low Achieving Pupils Project (LAPP), the rhetoric of Respect, Relevance and Reward informs a policy of curriculum entitlement for every young person.

In this paper I shall examine some of the assumptions underlying such policies and seek to explain them in terms of the contradictions briefly identified above. In particular I shall focus upon two key English initiatives in this respect: national 'bench-mark' testing and records of achievement to illustrate the potentially fundamental change of emphasis in the nature and role of educational assessment which is taking place at the present time. By means of a brief socio-historical analysis of the emerging role of assess-

ment in education I shall examine the significance of current contradictions in each educational assessment which now confront us.

The evolution of evaluative language

Durkeim (1947) suggested that

> 'Even the most cursory historical survey is enough to make us realise that degrees and examinations are of relatively recent origin; there was nothing equivalent in classical antiquity .... the word and the thing only appear in the Middle Ages with the university' (p.126)

The explanation Durkheim offers for this invention is that the system of degrees and examinations derives from the corporate organisation of educational provision. He suggests that the existing feudal model of the series of initiations or stages which must be gone through before penetrating to the heart of any organisation - such as page, squire and bachelor before becoming a fully-armed knight - was a natural model for educational 'stages' to be introduced once the teachers, "instead of teaching separately, formed themselves into a corporation with a sense of its own identity and governed by communal laws" (p. 130). That is to say, the advent of certification depended on the institutionalisation of education in the form of schools and colleges. From this it was but a short step to the institution of some organised course of study or curriculum (see Hamilton, 1983).

At this stage the function of assessment was almost entirely ritualistic, a 'rite de passage' modelled on traditional concepts of initiation which served the purpose of demarcating those who had reached a level of scholarship and commitment which justified their entry to the next level. The examination itself may be seen purely in terms of legitimation - a public relations exercise which confirmed a selection which had already been undertaken, informally, by the teacher. But if the university was to keep this manifestation of its corporate existence almost entirely unchanged in its essential structure until the present day, one element was to change fundamentally - the use of assessment for motivating and controlling students.

Durkheim describes the situation of the young arts student in the Middle

Ages who, at between 13 and 15 years of age, was accorded almost complete freedom from supervison or exhortation. This was a system of education which

> 'endured several centuries, which excited intellectual life throughout Europe and maintained it at a particularly high lever of intensity and in which, nevertheless, such artificial educational devices (competitions, tests and periodical formal rewards) were unknown' (p.160)

> 'We are so accustomed to believing that emulation is the essential motivating force in academic life, that we cannot easily imagine how a school could exist which did not have a carefully worked out system of graduated awards in order to keep the enthusiasm of pupils perpetualy alive. Good marks, solemn statements of satisfactory performance, distinctions, competition essays, prizegivings: all these seem to us, in differing degrees, the necessary accompaniment to any sound educational system. The system that operated in France and indeed Europe, until the sixteenth century, was characterised by the surprising fact that there were no rewards at all from success in examinations. What is more, any candidate who had assiduously and conscientiously followed the course of studies was certain of success.' (p. 159)

Until the end of the 15th century, pupils were treated like autonomous adults. Then, in France at least, the status of pupils gradually changed. They became minors, shut off from the world in educational institutions in which they were powerless to resist the authority of those put in to teach and regulate them. Although the timing of this process was particular to the educational history of France, the link between the advent of institutionalised education organised around substantial, monastic-style disciplinary powers, and the advent of educational assessment is a more general one. "Academic discipline implies a system of rewards no less than a system of punishment" (Durkheim, 1947, p. 159).

Nowhere was this more clearly seen than in the educational practices of the Jesuits from the mid sixteenth century. The Jesuits placed equal emphasis on the power of competition.

> 'Not only were they the first to organise the competitive system in the colleges but they also developed it to a point of greater intensity than it has ever subsequently known ...'

> 'Academic work involved a kind of perpetual hand-to-hand combat. Camp challenged camp, group struggled with group, supervised one another, corrected one another and took one another to task. It was thanks to this division of labour between the teacher and the pupils, that one teacher was able without much difficulty to run classes which sometimes numbered as many as 200-300 pupils. In addition to such methods of chronically recurring competition there were intermittent competitions too numerous to enumerate ... Thus an infinite wealth of devices maintained the self-esteem of pupils in a constant state of extreme

excitation.' (p. 261)

One effect of this policy, Durkheim suggests, was that the genuinely intensive activity which it fostered was flawed by being expended on the superficial rather than the profound, still a major criticism of the effect of exam-motivated learning.

The reason for this sudden shift from the extreme of no assessment to that of extreme competition, Durkheim suggests, was the advent of individual self-consciousness that characterised the Renaissance. Thus education too had had to become individualised, no longer a uniform and homogeneous activity, the teacher must get to know pupils and be able to provide differentially according to their diverse needs. In the same way, "the individual cannot be motivated or trained to act in the same way, as an amorphous crowd, he must be convinced and moved by considerations which are specifically appropriate to him" - notably, competition.

> 'It is no accident that competition becomes more lively and plays a more substantial role in society as the movement towards individualisation become more advanced. Since the moral organisation of the school must reflect that of civil society, since the methods which are applied to the child cannot differ in essence from those which, later on, will be applied to the man, it is clear that the processes of the medieval disciplinary system could not survive; it is clear that discipline had to become more personal and take greater account of individual feelings and consequently allow for a degree of competitiveness.' (p. 264)

Thus not only did the institution of formal assessment procedures encourage the growth of individual competitiveness in education, it also helped to change the quality of the teacher-pupil relations to one which emphasised a more personal, 'formative-evaluation' in teaching in place of the older more impersonal style.

Durkheim's analysis in this respect has been extended and deepened by the more recent work of Hoskin (1979) whose studies of the history of assessment allow him to distinguish a disjuncture between the advent of assessment per se and that associated with the more specific practice of allocating specific marks, the latter, he argues beging central to the construction of modern social organization. In a more recent paper, Hoskin and Macue (1986) link the emergence of assessment to that of accounting and bookkeeping and the new

modes of re-writing the social world which emerged towards the end of the medieval period. They emphasise the emergence of an 'arithmetic mentality' which found its earliest forms of expression in the re-writing of primary texts for more efficient information retrieval which developed in the thirteenth century. It was pedagogues concerned with the problems of ordering knowledge and the desirability of cross-referencing texts in order to critique them that helped to bring about the use, for example, of arabic numerals, the visual ordering of contents and the use of concordances. Such conceptual and practical developments, argue Hoskin and Macue, allowed the emergence of accountancy and it is significant that in 1220, the English Court used the term 'contrarotulus' or 'contre-rolle' from which the word 'control' developed, for this process of book-keeping. This 'control,' was essentially an accounting of acts, its nature clearly expressed in the practices of the Jesuits already referred to whose 'Ratio Studiorium' represented a distillation of current educational practices:

> 'Teachers operated as guards and spies, opening letters and submitting regular reports on bad behaviour and maintaining registers for attendance and conduct; they were aided by pupils who were appointed as officer-monitors and organized in a hierarchical system with titles derived from Roman military and political practice (Durkheim, 1977, pp.245 ff). Judgement was exercised through punishment for the bad and prizes for the good, based on the evidence of the reports and registers. But this was not a normalizing judgement. Instead there was a system of constant competition between pupils based upon the principle of emulation. Such a system worked well for the very good (and presumably the very bad) but it could not provide a measure of individual profit-and-loss across the total population since it was an ordinal system, which gave a measure only of relative worth. Pupils were moved up and down in rank according to performance but there was no independent "objective" measure of self-worth, i.e. it was not a system of marks.'

According to Hoskin and Macue,

> 'The culmination of the pre-modern educational discipline comes in the early monitorial systems of Bell and Lancaster (1790 - 1800) (as described by Salman. 1935) in which there was a complex system of recording and judging acts. In Lancaster's system this even involved monetary reward for merit tickets. It was still pre-modern however, because it was not a "pure" currency which automatically evaluated all pupils, forming in itself a system of punishment/reward' (p. 126)

Hoskin and Macue associate the 'catastrophe' or 'deconstruction' of the older

mode of bureaucracy which marked the end of the Enlightenment and beginning of the modern era with the shift from the individuality of the 'memorable man' to that of mass 'calculable man' (Foucault 1972 p. 193) which accompanied the advent of marks and the notion that human qualities could not only be ranked; they could also be quantified in mathematical terms. Only a mathematical system could combine both a record of accounting of acts (accountability) and a currency (marks) which attributes differential value to those acts. Put another way this allows the allocation of a specific value to each performance and the allocation of a general standard of values across the population. Thus, as Foucault (1977) argues,

> 'at first awarded for academic work, these (mathematical marks) are extended to cover all aspects of behaviour and performance, and so the examination leaves behind it a whole meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days'

in the form of written performance and records. This material makes it possible to generate a 'history' of each individual and simultaneously to classify the individuals 'en masse' into categories, and eventually into 'populations' with norms. Thus,

> 'examination discipline and accounting are historically bound together as related ways of uniting the world (in texts, institutional arrangements, ultimately in persons) into new configurations of power.'
> Hoskin and Macue (p. 107)

At one level, this analysis provides a coherent theoretical explanation for the assessment policy events we are now witnessing. Clearly in England and Wales at least the intention is to provide a currency on which to base a global 'account' of education and of each individual's 'value' in relation to that global currency. But to accept this analysis at face value would be to ignore the contradictory messages embodied in current assessement policies. Indeed Polan (1987) suggests that we are in the midst of an educational revolution to which current government policies are merely an inadequate response - an unsustainable reaction whose intention is to stem the tide of change.

> The making of a discourse is a confused business, and the more visible developments that occur at such an early point are perhaps more likely

to run counter to the needs of that discourse than to promote it. As Foucault demonstrated in his analyses of insanity, punishment, illness, and sexuality as discourses of modernity, to grasp the significant processes we often have to turn to an excavation of documents and initiatives that are hidden or unregarded to obtain some picture of the discourse that is likely to emerge as a coherent and imperious 'common sense' only years or decades later. (p2)

The New Assessment Paradigm: Profiles and Records of Achievement

The 'tide of change' that Polan refers to is an essentially teacher-led pressure for more pupil-centred and liberating curriculum and assessment techniques. The characteristics of this revolution are closely associated with the new assessment paradigm which Murphy and Pennycuick (1985) identify as having the following features:

1) recognising a much wider range of achievement than hitherto
2) providing meaningful and positive descriptions of what all pupils can do
3) promoting curriculum development
4) enhancing pupil motivation and teacher morale
5) leading to a more harmonious relationship between assessment, curriculum and teaching

But to many, the potential 'humanization' of education that the above principles represent threatens in practice to be a much more intrusive and controlling device in which 'every aspect of the young individual is subject to monitoring, surveillance, intervention and adjustment' (Polan, 1987). The 'promise and the peril' of such individualist assessment procedures (Broadfoot and Fenner, 1985) reach their fullest expression in the procedure known as 'profiling' which involves pupils and teachers jointly constructing an assessment record over a wide range of academic and personal objectives. This process ultimately culminates in a summative 'record of achievement' that pupils have when they leave school or college. It is Government policy that from 1990 all school leavers in England and Wales should have such a document.

At the most negative, profiles can be seen as one of the many formaliza-

tions of a hitherto informal process made necessary by the

> 'hyper-individualism of modern society which separates individuals from the roles they occupy.' (Berger 1987)

The resultant proliferation of formal contractual obligations to structure any given situation irrespective of the individuals involved (Polan, p. 12) is made possible by the development of a language of accountability and thus control described above. Profiling in this sense can be seen as a throwback to the pre-quantitative assessment era when it was the acts themselves which were recorded rather than a refined abstraction of the results of those acts in the form of marks.

There is an important difference however. Whereas the assessments of the Jesuits and the Christian Brothers, Bell and Lancaster and other early educationists were as comprehensive as profiles in that they judged both learning and behaviour, the process was essentially an external one. Profiling as currently understood in the United Kingdom is as much an internal process in which the pupil is encouraged to reflect upon, and even reveal, his or her inner self as part of the record. What Polan calls the 'subjectivization' of assessment is thus a classic example of Foucault's self surveillance in which it is the individuals who apply 'normalizing judgement' to themselves. Hoskin (1978) quotes one of the earliest articulations of this process in quoting Adam Smith's 'Theory of Moral Sentiments':

> 'I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner or judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of'
>
> (Section III, 1 2-6)

Profiling thus represents a new disciplinary technique which -in combining the most powerful aspects of the old discourse - comprehensiveness - with the most powerful of the new - self-surveillance - has the potential to exercise more effective control than any assessment procedure yet devized. Whether in practice it does so would appear to hinge on the nature of the criteria used as a basis for the judgements made. If these criteria are self-generated and individualistic, the process of profiling and the eventual record of achievement produced is likely to fulfil the liberal educational rhetoric that celebrates

the integrity of the individual and a curriculum based on respect relevance and reward. It is this vision that lies behind the widespread professional enthusiasm for profiling and even finds faint echoes in current Government rhetoric such as the 1987 Consultative Document itself on the proposed Great Education Reform Bill (GERBIL) as this paragraph sets out:-

> 27. Within the programmes of study teachers will be free to determine the detail of what should be taught in order to ensure that pupils achieve appropriate levels of attainment. How teaching is organised and the teaching approaches used will be also for schools to determine. It is proposed that schools should set out schemes of work for teaching at various stages to improve coordination. The Government intends that legislation should leave full scope for professional judgement and for schools to organise how the curriculum is delivered in the way best suited to the ages, circumstances, needs and abilities of the children in each classroom. This will for example allow curriculum development programmes such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) to build on the framework offered by the national curriculum and to take forward its objectives. There must be space to accommodate the enterprise of teachers, offering them sufficient flexibility in the choice of content to adapt what they teach to the needs of the individual pupil, to try out and develop new approaches, and to develop in pupils those personal qualities which cannot be written into a programme of study or attainment target.

It is clearly expressed in the Government's own policy statement on records of achievement (1984) and the more recent Interim Report of the Records of Achievement National Steering Committee (RANSC) (1987) which is charged with drawing up policy guidelines for the national implementation of 'records of achievement'.

But if as Andy Hargreaves has argued (1986) pupils are likely to recognize the underlying power structure of the process as this is represented in particular values, they are more than likely for the purposes of the profile, to aspire to those values they perceive as having most social currency. Certainly it is widely agreed that for profiling to fulfil a humanizing, rather than a totalitarian function, schools and teachers must change as much as pupils. Both must negotiate new shared meanings about the educational process (Phillps and Hargreaves 1987, Rudduck, 1986)

Evidence has begun to be available that suggests such change is both possible and fruitful. The evaluation of the Technical and Voational

Education Initiative (TVEI) in which profiling has an explicit role, reveals pupils learning to work in groups and the abandonment of 'the dogma of enforced individualism' p. 29 (TVEI 1987) and calls for new group assessment approaches to be made available. Many other recent initiatives at the level of both policy and practice reflect an attempt to break out of the traditional curriculum, and pedagogic approaches which owe much of their continuing dominance to the prevailing standardisation-aimed individualist assessment discourse and its four informing principles of competence, competition, content and control.

As intimated at the beginning of this paper one reason for the powerful movement towards alternative educational models at the present time is that identified by Habermas (1971): namely the increasing difficulty of linking

> 'status assignment in an ever subjectively convincing manner to the mechanism for the evaluation of individual achievement'

and the problems of educational and social control this disjuncture represents. Equally part of the reason may be a humanitarian backlash against an ever more explict climate of laissez-faire individualism and the use of utilitarian rhetoric to justify widening social inequality.

But it is the relationship between the two powerful and contrasting educational cultures currently informing national policy which is likely to prove critical in determining the outcome. In its evidence to the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) which is responsible for advising the Secretary of State for Education in England and Wales on how to devise a coherent and balanced national assessment system, as set out in the Consultative Document, RANSC, the committee charged with formulating recommendations about National Guidelines for the institution of Records of Achievement (RoA) to the Secretary of State, identifies a number of areas of incompatibility between the two initiatives. The most notable of these are pupil involvement and control of records of achievement and the latter's broadly-based and essentially comprehensive focus. Nevertheless the document emphasises the need for complementary development of the two initiatives and suggests that:

19. RoA, by giving weight to those aspects of the formal, informal, or extra curriculum which lie beyond the foundation subjects, can present pupils' national curriculum achievements within the context of the totality of their achievements and experiences in and outside the classroom. They can therefore redress any tendency on the part of those who make use of the NC assessments to ascribe undue importance to achievement against predetermined subject attainment targets.

However, a more detailed consideration of what the proposals for National testing involved, will reveal just how incompatible these two policy movements are.

Policies of Resistance: The Great Education Reform Bill of 1987

The 1987 call for testing all children at age 7 (or thereabouts) 11, 14 and 16 has alarmed the education research community. Many support it but few fail to recognise potentially damaging elements in a very revolutionary Act. The core of the Government's proposals in this respect and the thinking behind them is embodied in paragraph 23 of the National Curriculum 5-16 Consultation document (DES 1987) as follows:

23. Attainment targets will be set for all three core subjects of Maths, English and science. These will establish what children should normally be expected to know, understand and be able to do at around the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16, and will enable the progress of each child to be measured against established national standards. They will reflect what pupils must achieve to progress in their education and to become thinking and informed people. The range of attainment targets should cater for the full ability range and be sufficiently challenging at all levels to raise expectations, particularly of pupils of middling achievement who frequently are not challenged enough, as well as stretching and stimulating the most able. This is a proven and essential way towards raising standards of achievement. Targets must be sufficiently specific for pupils, teachers, parents and others to have a clear idea of what is expected, and to provide a sound basis for assessment.

24. There will also be attainment targets for other foundation subjects where appropriate, in Wales for the study of Welsh, and for the other themes and skills taught through each of the foundation subjects. For art, music and physical education there will be guidelines rather than specific attainment targets.

28. The attainment targets will provide standards against which pupils' progress and performance can be assessed. The main purpose of such assessment will be to show what a pupil has learnt and mastered and to enable teachers and parents to ensure that he or she is making adequate progress. Where such progress is not made, it will be up to schools to make suitable arrangements to help the pupil.

29. The Secretaries of State envisage that much of the assessment at ages 7 (or thereabouts) 11 and 14, at 16 in non-examined subjects,

> will be done by teachers as an intergral part of normal classroom work. But at the heart of the assessment process there will be nationally prescribed tests done by all pupils to supplement the individual teachers' assessments. Teachers will administer and mark these, but their marking - and their assessment overall - will be externally moderated.

Such statements offer explicit and revealing insights into the rationale informing current policy thinking in English education and therefore merit a more detailed analysis. What are the assumptions upon which proposals for national testing rest?

According to Morris we have here a hangover 'of pre-first-world war thinking about how the human race ticks' (Morris 1987). The government's emphasis is on subject disciplines and competition, the acquisition of knowledge and unproblematic, generalized curriculum goals. This simplistic thinking about what and how pupils learn is expressed as a given with no hard evidence offered to back up assumptions made. As the National Association of Governors and Managers puts it in a recent critique (1987), the expertise of local education authorities, professionals and researchers; the evidence of many countries with hitherto centralized education systems seeking to decentralize - both are brushed aside. There is an appeal, throughout, as much to parents vanity regarding their own children as to the genuine raising of standards' (p46). Among the assumptions embodied in the Consultative document are the following: assumtions in the Consultative document are as follows:

1) that what has been studied is equivalent to what has been learnt (para 9)

2) that the curriculum ought to continue in what is essentially the nineteenth century grammar school model of subjects of which maths, English and science will be the core. Although these may be 'delivered' in novel ways (para 27), no reference is made to obliging schools to offer the less instrumental fields of study such as personal and social education, childcare, and philosophy which many would now regard as among the most exciting and vital areas of the curriculum in properly preparing youngsters for adult life.

3) that learning is about what pupils 'know, do and understand' (para 22) so that, by implication, teaching pupils how to address issues of value, emotion and morality, encouraging the development of important

social skills is correspondingly disregarded.

4) that all pupils should be aiming towards the same learning targets rather than capitalizing on their diverse talents and interests.

5) that those products of learning that can be directly assessed provide a valid basis for judging the nature and impact of the learning process itself.

> 'The entire document' writes Maurice Holt, 'is steeped in the mechanistic assumption that schools can be run like biscuit factories: providing the skills and technology are there, backed by clear objectives and precise assessment, the right product will roll off the assembly line.'
>
> Holt (1987)

And indeed it is testing that provides the core of the whole enterprise and the key to any sociological understanding of its provenance. For as Nuttall (1987) points out, in technical terms the proposed bench-mark testing is almost certainly doomed to failure. If the experience of the Assessment of Performance Unit set up in 1974 to monitor national standards of attainment is not enough evidence for this, the abortive search for Grade-criteria to accompany the new 16+ 'General Certificate of Education' (GCSE) examination reinforces it. This project is now almost totally moribund because it could not overcome some crucial difficulties. Theoretically there is the problem of differentiating and expressing assessment objectives; technically there are the problems of test-construction and making the tests feasible for teachers to administer; practically there is the question of reducing assessment against a multiplicity of objectives to one scale. There is also the research evidence of bias in the assessment situation to be considered, Murphy (1987) raises similar difficulties. If, as Nuttall argues:

> 'sensitive comprehensive positive and valid assessment is in itself a tall order and we cannot yet be sure that we have achieved it in GCSE despite 17 years of intensive research and development (building on the experience of existing examinations coupled more recently with the major programme of INSET. When many of the innovations of the APU and the GCSE are generalized to other age groups; where there is no shared understanding of grading systmes - no history of moderation and where the success of the enterprise is dependent upon the hard work and good will of the whole teaching profession, the goal of such high quality assessment must be infinitely harder to achieve.
>
> (Nuttall 1987 p7/8)

Further to this there are the obvious problems for LEAs of finding the

money required for carrying out the tests and for the necessary training of teachers in assessment techniques.

There are two possible conclusions that can be drawn from the Government's apparent disregard of these significant practical and technical difficulties inherent in their testing proposals. One is that they refuse to acknowledge the evidence of experts and of experience in believing that this time it will be possible to pull the assessment rabbit out of the hat with a relatively small injection of resources. Alternatively they are aware of these problems and are choosing to disregard them because it may well be argued the real purpose of the proposed tests lies elsewhere. That at the heart of the proposals is not the accurate assessment of <u>individual</u> pupil achievement but the reinforcement of procedures for surveillance and control through a discourse of competition and accountability. The nature of this discourse is clearly expressed in para 36 of the Consultative Document.

> 36. The Secretaries of State believe that it is essential that:-
>
> (i) <u>Pupils</u> and <u>parents</u> should know what individual pupils are being taught in each year, and how that relates to the national curriculum attainment targets and programmes of study. Similar information would have been provided to parents under regulations made under Section 20 of the 1986 Education Act, which the legislation on the national curriculum will supersede. They also need to know how the individual pupil has performed against the attainment targets, and by comparison with the range of marks achieved by pupils in his or her class - for example 10% got Grade 1, 20% Grade 2, 30% Grade 3.
>
> (ii) <u>Teachers</u> should know how individual pupils are progressing so that they can decide on appropriate next steps for their learning; and how pupils in their class overall are doing as compared with the attainment targets, with other similar classes in the school, and with other schools, particularly in the same LEA and with the national average.

It is a language of control relating to both the content and mode of education. Each interested party needs to both <u>know</u> and <u>compare</u>, the inplication being that if the results of that comparison are unfavourable, whether based on individual pupil tests, the evaluation of teacher or overall school performance or of the education system as a whole, pressure

for change will be exerted. This Hobbsian 'all against all' situation well expresses the prevailing economic ethos of achievement being predicated on the motivation of self-interest.

Thus at one level this is the end of the story. It is a logical, if deporable, development that education policy should become informed by those same principles of free-market competition and consumer choice currently very evident in other areas of State activity. John Mann who presided over the Schools Council when it produced its very different suggestions for the common school curriculum 'The Practical Curriculum' in 1981, wrote in a recent article:

> '.... it may not be education but it will certainly be efficient. The whole package of targets, programmes, assessment and public information is a model which Ministers might like to adopt for other public services like prisons, health and the army ...' (p30)

and Holt (1987)

> 'The approach requires an attendant army of officials and inspectors; indeed it is the bureaucrats who will be the real beneficiaries...'

But while such procedures may be regarded as deplorable in England where they are novel, they are, and have for a long time been, the norm in other countries and it is the experience of these other countries which are now trying to move away from such bureaucracy which must now prompt us to question more deeply the nature of the changes under discussion.

Comparative insights

In France, for example, long famous for its centralized curriculum, significant attempts have been made to introduce more devolved educational governance under the Mitterand Government. The reasons for this, it would appear, are the need for more flexibile, locally relevant educational provision at a time of significant social and economic change and the sheer impossibility of managing anything like efficiently a bureaucracy of the size which the French education system has now become. A history of centralization has created teachers who are typically strongly conservative with no enthusiasm for, or experience of, teacher-led development work at a time when this is felt

to be urgently needed. (Broadfoot 1984, Broadfoot and Osborn 1987).

However this attempt to make the local area more accountable and flexible is taking place against a background of reinforcement of conservative values in the curriculum. The all-powerful control of the yearly curriculum 'programme' does not require any external assessment to police it. Rather it operates quite simply through the hierarchical nature of the curriculum such that each teacher feels duty-bound to make every effort to ensure that each of her pupils has mastered the syllabus objectives for a particular year since successful coverage is a prerequisite to moving up a class. Why then is it felt necessary to introduce 'bench-mark' tests to ensure that conformity and standards are maintained in England?

Similarly in W. Germany where the system of 'notenskala' so much admired by the DES and HMI prevails (Hill, 1986), is merely a six point grading scale ranging from 'very good' to 'very poor' awarded by teachers with no clear statement of criteria and no external moderation. But as Chisholm (1987) points out:

> 'Pupils (in Germany) are under great pressure to achieve demonstrably and continuously ..... Equally significant is the process of internal socialization in the primary school years whereby children gradually learn to see grading as personal affirmation ....'

In West Germany too an elaborate paraphernalia of tests is clearly not necessary to inculcate the desired competitive spirit among pupils, parents, teachers and schools.

Put in context, what the experience of these other countries teaches us is that control of the nature and content of education such as that apparently desired by the British Government at the present time involves a complex interaction of factors which combine together to influence teachers' professional ideology. The critical issue is one of legitimacy, that is to say, what influences are regarded by teachers themselves as desirable. Thus, because French and German teachers are themselves deeply committed to the system of national curriculum objectives and regular checks of pupils' progress

in relation to these objectives, the system works very well in its own terms. By contrast, attempts to force teachers to conform to such procedures where these are alien to tradition - as in the United States - creating a crisis in morale and doubtful benefits.

In England they are also alien to tradition and it is for this reason that such an elaborate paraphernalia of external assessment is being instituted - to force teachers to flout their existing professional ideology concerning the appropriate means and ends of education, replacing it with the much narrower, less creative and personalized, more punitive and competitive ideology found in many of the countries of Europe and most notably in Asia where educational instrumentalism has perhaps reached its highest expression.

Forseeing the future

Thus the impact of the policies embodied in the 1987 Bill appears to depend on two considerations. First whether the policies prove feasible, and, if so, how they will combine with other aspects of the contemporary educational context to effect change. One possible outcome is that, as suggested above, 'bench-mark testing' will founder on the technical and practical problems associated with its implementation and, like the APU, fade into insignificance leaving the new national curriculum open to a good deal of institutional and teacher interpretation. This would be the nearest option to retaining the status quo but would probably be unacceptable to government in leaving an unpopular notion of what a national curriculum should contain largely at the mercy of professional subversion. This situation would be likely to prompt other measures to protect the curriculum and encourage competition and control.

Another possible outcome is that bench-mark testing may be successfully implemented but again, like the APU, be implemented in a much more limited way than currently proposed. This might mean retaining only the norm-referencing element from the dual norm + criterion-referenced model proposed in the consultative document as quoted on p .. (para 36 (i)). This option would however strip the proposed testing policy of its educationist dimension so that

devoid of the legitimating rhetoric of diagnosis and remediation, the emphasis on competition would be clearly revealed for what it is - a crude motivation and control device. The point is well made by Rowntree (1987) in a quotation from Lewis Carroll:

> '"How can you possibly award prizes when everybody missed the target?" said Alice. "Well," said the Queen, "some missed by more than others and we have a fine normal distribution of misses, which means we can forget about the target."

It is doubtful whether such a policy could be imposed indefinitely against concerted professional opposition and perhaps substantial parental disquiet as well and would eventually have to be abandoned.

A third possible outcome is that it will prove possible to institute some form of testing that appears to fulfil the goals of the consultation document. Even so, will its impact be that envisaged by the policy-makers? As Plaskow (1987) has pointed out, organizational or structural change can only be effective if considered within the context of the aims and intentions of the members of that organization. Raising standards, in the way envisaged, he suggests, would require an organic institutional and ideological change which national curriculum and bench-mark tests by themselves are unlikely to bring about. Even such an elaborate system of control and incentives is unlikely to produce the effect that much simpler and cheaper approaches so readily achieve in France and Germany because they are ideologically alien to English educational discourse. Can we therefore deduce from this analysis that there is nothing to fear from bench-mark testing and that, given time and a little effort, more constructive educational assessment policies will provide?

The answer to this question rests on a consideration of the policy context as a whole. It depends on whether bench-mark testing is an isolated initiative - a psychometric aberration from a previous age like the curriculum it is related to or whether it is merely one manifestation of a much more powerful control procedure. In the latter case such a manifestation would be likely to reflect underlying and general features of post-industrial society as referred to briefly at the beginning of this paper mediated by the

institutional and ideological context of a particular national education culture. It is too early to be clear which of these is the case.

By the same token it cannot yet be determined which of the two apparently contradictory assessment paradigms described in this paper which are informing current English assessment policy - the one objective and system-centred, the other more subjective and learner-centred will emerge as the pre-eminent. Indeed this is the wrong focus for speculation. As major rivals on the contemporary policy stage they need to be taken into account in relation to each other in order to assess whether their common deep-structure of evaluative discourse will prove more significant than their apparently contradictory principles. There seems to me to be a very grave danger that the incorporation of the records of achievement initiative within the framework of the national curriculum and testing proposals will, with supreme irony, provide the critical element to make the latter successful. This is because despite some serious misgivings about their practicality, records of achievement are fully in tune with many, if not most, teachers' professional ideology in England. In their commitment to valuing the whole person, to the individualization of the learning process and mutual respect between teacher and taught, records of achievement and other similarly informed initiatives may well attract strong support from those unhappy with the national curriculum proposals. It seems unlikely however that the institution of RoA within the structure of a national curriculum and assessment framework will be sufficient to soften in any significant way the impact of the latter. What it may well do, however, is to cloak the crude attempts at control which are the rationale for such assessment in an apparently more educationally-oriented recording procedure, this will get over the very substantial problems of legitimation currently being provoked by the more explicit strategies embodied in the 1988 Bill.

It is doubtful that this is part of a deliberate policy of seduction on the part of Government. It is more likely that it represents a continuing concern on the part of the latter to prepare young people as fully as possible with the skills sought by employers. Indeed the Consultative Document makes

this explicit:

> 'the programmes of work (will be expected) to contribute to the development in young people of personal qualities and competence, such as self-reliance, self discipline, and enterprising approach and the ability to solve practical real-world problems, which will stand them in good stead in later life'

As such the rationale echoes the well-worn role of assessment in terms of competence, content and control referred to earlier in this paper. Nowhere in the 1988 Bill is there any hint of the explicitly educational discourse which for most teachers lies at the heart of the movement to institute records of achievement. Helping pupils to know themselves and develop as confident individuals; to be motivated to learn for its own sake; to have self-respect and respect others; to be responsible for their own learning - none of these objectives appears to conform to the National Curriculum proposals. Instead it would appear that with bench-mark testing and mandatory curriculum objectives fulfilling primarily the requirements for the regulation of content, competition and system control and RoA providing a complementary basis for individual control and a broader regulation of content, the two together may provide one of the most effective forms of surveillance ever devised in education. Far from assessment provoking a legitimation crisis, as Habermas (1971) suggests, it may well be reflecting the emergence of a new form of disciplinary power into which the post-enlightenment abstract language of account which made possible psychometric testing and self surveillance is combined with the pre-modern disciplinary code of direct surveillance of the person as a whole rather than as the occupant of a series of contractually-defined roles.

If my analysis is correct, it carries a clear message for those teachers who support the new assessment paradigm to be extremely wary of attempts to incorporate the records of achievement initiative within the proposed National Assessment framework. For researchers the message is equally clear. There is an urgent need for the perilously atheoretical tidal wave of development and evaluation which is currently sweeping schools, to be informed by the kind of critical analysis which can take evaluation beyond the pragmatic and the immediate. Only by attempting to develop a deeper understanding of the forces

that inform particular policies can we hope to anticipate fully their potential significance and so have a basis for action.

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APPENDIX

YOUTH TRAINING SCHEME - MONTHLY ASSESSMENT

NAME ....

MONTH ....

COMPANY .... 1st/2nd/3rd Placement (Tick)

ABILITIES	GRADE	ABILITIES	GRADE	REMARKS
Timekeeping		Application		
Response to discipline		Initiative		
Co-operation		Communication		
Conduct		Number and its application		
Level of confidence		Planning and problem solving		
Attitude to instruction		Computer literacy/ Information Technology		
Working with others		Practical progress		
Systematic approach to work		Interest		
Practical safety		Potential for development		

GRADINGS: A - Very good (90 - 100%)
B - Good (60 - 89%)
C - Satisfactory (40 - 59%)
D - Unsatisfactory (0 - 39%)

(Note: the norm will fall between grades B and C)

Lecturer's signature ..... Date .....

Trainee's Signature ..... Date .....

General Comments:

An example of a formative profile